

Project Lead-Safe KCK Targets At-Risk Homes To Reduce Childhood Lead Poisoning

A new program in Kansas City, Kansas to reduce childhood lead poisoning was launched Friday, June 4. Federal, State, and Unified Government of Wyandotte County/KCK officials announced the kick-off of Project Lead-Safe KCK at a news conference this afternoon.

Project Lead-Safe KCK is the result of a nearly \$3 million Lead Hazard Control grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE). Ron Green is the KDHE Project Manager for this grant.

The project will provide lead abatement and testing services in 250 qualified housing units in Kansas City, Kansas and Wyandotte County over a three-year period; assist approximately 300 children from low-income families; and provide training for lead abatement workers and supervisors.

“Childhood lead poisoning remains one of the leading environmental health risks facing our state’s children, yet it is entirely preventable,” said Roderick Bremby, Secretary of KDHE. “This program will positively impact many children in the community for the rest of their lives by removing lead from their homes and reducing the dangers at the point in their lives when they are most vulnerable to lead’s harmful effects.”

“I am pleased to see Kansas City, KS, and Wyandotte County benefit from federal funds for such a necessary project that will help ensure the safety and well-being of the children in the area,” said Dennis Moore, U.S. Congressman 3rd District. “Projects like this show the importance of partnerships between federal, state, and local governments.”

The goals of Project Lead-Safe KCK include reducing lead hazards in homes built before 1978, identifying children who have lead poisoning, providing training for lead abatement contractors, increasing the community's capacity to address lead-based paint hazards, and increasing community education about lead. Priority will be given to housing units with children who have elevated blood lead levels and low-income families. Wyandotte County residents may learn whether they are eligible to receive assistance through Project Lead-Safe KCK by calling 913-262-0796 or at www.unleadedks.com.



KDHE Secretary Roderick Bremby and U.S. Congressman Dennis Moore, D-KS, explain the importance of keeping Wyandotte County kids safe from the perils of lead poisoning.

"By significantly reducing or eliminating potential sources of lead exposure in older homes throughout the area, Project Lead-Safe KCK will improve children's health, and therefore, have a direct impact on their potential and ability to succeed," said State Representative Valdenia Winn.

The family of Brannae Browne, of Kansas City, KS, learned last year that their home had high concentrations of lead in several areas, including the interior window paint, the exterior walls and window casing and soil near the porch. Brannae experienced health problems that pointed to lead poisoning and a blood test later confirmed elevated levels of lead. Once the family moved to a different home and eliminated Brannae's exposure to lead, her health improved dramatically. Unfortunately, Brannae is just one of many children in the area who has gone through this experience.



Brannae Browne

Symptoms of childhood lead poisoning can include headache, lack of appetite, vomiting, fatigue, anemia, stomach pain, constipation, or seizures. Since these symptoms can link to other illnesses, lead poisoning isn't always considered as the cause. In some cases, symptoms aren't apparent so the family may be unaware of the dangerous lead levels within the home. The only way to be certain is through a blood test. In addition to physical illness, lead can interfere with a child's ability to learn, cause a delay in speech or result in behavioral problems.

Lead is found in old paint, even dust and soil, and may also be found in food stored in lead crystal or lead-glazed pottery or porcelain.

"In Wyandotte County, approximately 87 percent of the homes were built before 1978 when lead-based paint was common," said Mayor Pro Tem Donald DeSeure. "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates approximately 900 children living in Kansas City, KS have elevated blood lead levels. These statistics reinforce the need for Project Lead-Safe KCK and we are pleased to see this project get underway today."

Many community partners are involved in the project and have committed support. They include the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/KCK, including the Wyandotte County Health Department and Wyandotte County Office of Community Development; AdVantage Associates; and El Centro, Inc.